

## Overview/Background

It's no secret that health care costs are spiraling out of control in this country. On average, we now spend more per person on health care than both food and housing. Insurance premiums are multiplying much faster than inflation, which prevents economic growth and leaves businesses with less money to give raises or hire more workers. While the quality and availability of medical care in the United States remains among the best in the world, many wonder whether we'd be better off adopting a universal government-controlled health care system like the one used in Canada.

## No

1. **There isn't a single government agency or division that runs efficiently; do we really want an organization that developed the U.S. Tax Code handling something as complex as health care?** Quick, try to think of one government office that runs efficiently. Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac? The Department of Transportation? Social Security Administration? Department of Education? There isn't a single government office that squeezes efficiency out of every dollar the way the private sector can. We've all heard stories of government waste such as million-dollar cow flatulence studies or the Pentagon's 14 *billion* dollar Bradley design project that resulted in a transport vehicle which when struck by a mortar produced a gas that killed every man inside. How about the U.S. income tax system? When originally implemented, it collected 1 percent from the highest income citizens. Look at it today. A few years back the government published a "Tax Simplification Guide", and the guide itself was over 1,000 pages long! This is what happens when politicians mess with something that should be simple. Think about the Department of Motor Vehicles. This isn't rocket science--they have to keep track of licenses and basic database information for state residents. However, the costs to support the department are enormous, and when was the last time you went to the DMV and didn't have to stand in line? If it can't handle things this simple, how can we expect the government to handle all the complex nuances of the medical system? If any private business failed year after year to achieve its objectives and satisfy its customers, it would go out of business or be passed up by competitors.
2. **"Free" health care isn't really free since we must pay for it with taxes; expenses for health care would have to be paid for with higher taxes or spending cuts in other areas such as defense, education, etc.** There's an entitlement mentality in this country that believes the government should give us a number of benefits such as "free" health care. But the government must pay for this somehow. What good would it do to wipe out a few hundred dollars of monthly health insurance premiums if our taxes go up by that much or more? If we have to cut AIDS research or education spending, is it worth it?

3. **Profit motives, competition, and individual ingenuity have always led to greater cost control and effectiveness.** Government workers have fewer incentives to do well. They have a set hourly schedule, cost-of-living raises, and few promotion opportunities. Compare this to private sector workers who can receive large raises, earn promotions, and work overtime. Government workers have iron-clad job security; private sector workers must always worry about keeping their jobs, and private businesses must always worry about cutting costs enough to survive.
4. **Government-controlled health care would lead to a decrease in patient flexibility.** At first glance, it would appear universal health care would *increase* flexibility. After all, if government paid for everything under one plan, you could in theory go to any doctor. However, some controls are going to have to be put in to keep costs from exploding. For example, would "elective" surgeries such as breast implants, wart removal, hair restoration, and lasik eye surgery be covered? Then you may say, that's easy, make patients pay for elective surgery. Although some procedures are obviously not needed, who decides what is elective and what is required? What about a breast reduction for back problems? What about a hysterectomy for fibroid problems? What about a nose job to fix a septum problem caused in an accident? Whenever you have government control of something, you have one item added to the equation that will most definitely screw things up--politics. Suddenly, every medical procedure and situation is going to come down to a political battle. The compromises that result will put in controls that limit patient options. The universal system in Canada forces patients to wait over 6 months for a routine pap smear. Canada residents will often go to the U.S. or offer additional money to get their health care needs taken care of.
5. **Patients aren't likely to curb their drug costs and doctor visits if health care is free; thus, total costs will be several times what they are now.** Co-pays and deductibles were put in place because there are medical problems that are more minor annoyances than anything else. Sure, it would be nice if we had the medical staff and resources to treat *every* ache and pain experienced by an American, but we don't. For example, what if a patient is having trouble sleeping? What if a patient has a minor cold, flu, or headache? There are scores of problems that we wouldn't go to a doctor to solve if we had to pay for it; however, if everything is free, why not go? The result is that doctors must spend more time on non-critical care, and the patients that really need immediate help must wait. In fact, for a number of problems, it's better if no medical care is given whatsoever. The body's immune system is designed to fight off infections and other illnesses. It becomes stronger when it can fight things off on its own. Treating the symptoms can prolong the underlying problem, in addition to the societal side effects such as the growing antibiotic resistance of certain infections.
6. **Just because Americans are uninsured doesn't mean they can't receive health care; nonprofits and government-run hospitals provide services to those who don't have insurance, and it is illegal to refuse emergency medical service because of a lack of insurance.** While uninsured Americans are a problem in



regards to total system cost, it doesn't mean health care isn't available. This issue shouldn't be as emotional since there are plenty of government and private medical practices designed to help the uninsured. It is illegal to refuse emergency treatment, even if the patient is an illegal immigrant.

7. **Government-mandated procedures will likely reduce doctor flexibility and lead to poor patient care.** When government controls things, politics always seep into the decision-making. Steps will have to be taken to keep costs under control. Rules will be put in place as to when doctors can perform certain expensive tests or when drugs can be given. Insurance companies are already tying the hands of doctors somewhat. Government influence will only make things worse, leading to decreased doctor flexibility and poor patient care.
8. **Healthy people who take care of themselves will have to pay for the burden of those who smoke, are obese, etc.** Universal health care means the costs will be spread to all Americans, regardless of your health or your need for medical care, which is fundamentally unfair. Your health is greatly determined by your lifestyle. Those who exercise, eat right, don't smoke, don't drink, etc. have far fewer health problems than the smoking couch potatoes. Some healthy people don't even feel the need for health insurance since they never go to the doctor. Why should we punish those that live a healthy lifestyle and reward the ones who don't?
9. **A long, painful transition will have to take place involving lost insurance industry jobs, business closures, and new patient record creation.** A universal health plan means the entire health insurance industry would be unnecessary. All companies in that area would have to go out of business, meaning all people employed in the industry would be out of work. A number of hospital record clerks that dealt with insurance would also be out of work. A number of these unemployed would be able to get jobs in the new government bureaucracy, but it would still be a long, painful transition. We'd also have to once again go through a whole new round of patient record creation and database construction, which would cost huge amounts of both time and money.
10. **Loss of private practice options and possible reduced pay may dissuade many would-be doctors from pursuing the profession.** Government jobs currently have statute-mandated salaries and civil service tests required for getting hired. There isn't a lot of flexibility built in to reward the best performing workers. Imagine how this would limit the options of medical professionals. Doctors who attract scores of patients and do the best work would likely be paid the same as those that perform poorly and drive patients away. The private practice options and flexibility of specialties is one of things that attracts students to the profession. If you take that away, you may discourage would-be students from putting themselves through the torture of medical school and residency.
11. **Malpractice lawsuit costs, which are already sky-high, could further explode since universal care may expose the government to legal liability, and the**

**possibility to sue someone with deep pockets usually invites more lawsuits.**

When you're dealing with any business, for example a privately-funded hospital, if an employee negligently causes an injury, the employer is ultimately liable in a lawsuit. If government funds all health care, that would mean the U.S. government, an organization with enormous amounts of cash at its disposal, would be ultimately responsible for the mistakes of health care workers. Whether or not a doctor has made a mistake, he or she is always a target for frivolous lawsuits by money-hungry lawyers & clients that smell deep pockets. Even if the health care quality is the same as in a government-funded system, the level of lawsuits is likely to increase simply because attorneys know the government has the money to make settlements and massive payouts. Try to imagine potential punitive damages alone. When the government has the ability to spend several *trillion* dollars per year, how much will a jury be willing to give a wronged individual who is feeble, disfigured, or dying?

12. **Government is more likely to pass additional restrictions or increase taxes on smoking, fast food, etc., leading to a further loss of personal freedoms.** With government-paid health care, any risky or healthy lifestyle will raise the dollar cost to society. Thus, politicians will be in a strong position to pass more "sin" taxes on things like alcohol, high-fat food, smoking, etc. They could ban trans fat, limit msg, eliminate high-fructose corn syrup, and so on. For some health nuts, this may sound like a good thing. But pretty soon, people will find they no longer have the option to enjoy their favorite foods, even in moderation, or alternatively, the cost of the items will be sky high. Also, it just gives the government yet another method of controlling our lives, further eroding the very definition of America, Land of the Free.
13. **Like social security, any government benefit eventually is taken as a "right" by the public, meaning that it's politically near impossible to remove or curtail it later on when costs get out of control.** Social security was originally put in place to help seniors live the last few years of their lives; however, the retirement age of 65 was set when average life spans were dramatically shorter. Now that people are regularly living into their 90s or longer, costs are skyrocketing out of control, making the program unsustainable. Despite the fact that all politicians know the system is heading for bankruptcy in a couple decades, no one is rushing to fix it. When President Bush tried to re-structure it with private accounts, the Democrats ran a scare campaign about Bush's intention to "take away your social security". Even though he promised no change in benefits, the fact that he was proposing change at all was enough to kill the effort, despite the fact that Democrats offered zero alternative plan to fix it. Despite Republican control of the presidency and both houses, Bush was not even close to having the political support to fix something that has to be fixed ASAP; politicians simply didn't want to risk their re-elections. The same pattern is true with virtually all government spending programs. Do you think politicians will ever be able to cut education spending or unemployment insurance?...Only if they have a political death wish. In time, the same would be true of universal health care spending. As costs skyrocket because of government inefficiency and an aging population,